



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Food Poisoning

What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning is caused by toxins (poisons) produced by certain kinds of bacteria that have grown in food due to lack of reaching proper food temperatures while food is cooking or during the holding period. Most outbreaks occur in facilities with poor cooling and refrigeration practices.

What are the symptoms of food poisoning?

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Weakness

Symptom onset can be rapid and violent. Fever is NOT a typical symptom of food poisoning. Dehydration may result from prolonged vomiting and diarrhea, but severe complications or death is very rare.

How is food poisoning spread?

Foods generally become contaminated through unwashed hands or from environmental sources. Food that is not cooked thoroughly or not stored at proper temperatures can allow bacteria to grow and produce toxins in the food. Food poisoning is NOT spread from person to person.

Who is at risk for getting food poisoning?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness.

How do I know if I have food poisoning?

Anyone having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours should consult a health care provider. The illness can be diagnosed by symptoms and rapid onset, but your health care provider may order tests to rule out other conditions.

How is food poisoning treated?

There is no vaccine or medication to cure food poisoning. Treatment is based on relieving symptoms. People with diarrhea and vomiting should drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

How is food poisoning prevented?

In general, food poisoning can be prevented by strictly following the guidelines below:

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom, after contact with animals, after swimming, before, during, and after food preparation, and after handling raw meat products.
- Clean food preparation work surfaces, equipment, and utensils with soap and water before, during, and after food preparation.
- Maintain safe food temperatures.
- Do not eat undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs.
- Do not eat foods past the expiration date.
- Do not eat unpasteurized dairy products.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Separate raw and cooked food.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/features/befoodsafe/>

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

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